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## KEEPING YOU POSTED

Headline news for busy  
church editors

**The UCC Office of Communication:**

**"Connecting the Gospel and Justice to Media, Churches and Community"**

**March 1997**

Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

**CHECK US OUT** — *Netguide Magazine* in January classified the UCC's home page as a four-star "Gold Site" on the World Wide Web, and described it as "elegantly designed."

What do you see when you visit the site? Well, first there are dazzling graphics, but more important is the content:

- Resource material from most of the national agencies including
  - Prayers
  - Sermon ideas
  - Social action alerts
  - Personal testimonies
  - Press releases
  - Ecumenical concerns
  - Stories from *United Church News*
  - The complete *Keeping You Posted*

New is an interactive *Prayer Chapel* where visitors can request prayers from other home page users. The *UCC Teleport* connects users to 90-plus UCC congregations with home pages, five conferences and dozens of partner churches in the United States and abroad.

So, check us out: <<http://www.ucc.org>>.

**OH NO!** — Definition of an optimist is a parishioner who puts his coat on when the preacher says "finally."

**CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM IS A MORAL ISSUE** — It's time for the religious community to back campaign finance reform, says the Rev. Jay Lintner, head of the Washington office of the UCC's Office for Church in Society. With the National Council of Churches, Lintner has forged a coalition of major faith groups to seek legislation to clean up the money mess. "We either turn this Congress totally over to special interests," insists Lintner, "or we decide to speak out."

Many religious leaders, including UCC President the Rev. Paul H. Sherry, are doing just that. They sent an open letter to Congress in February asking its members to make campaign finance reform one of the first acts of the new legislative session.

"We pledge our support and we pledge to work among members of our churches and religious communities throughout the nation to encourage support for your efforts to bring about reform," the leaders said.

The issue, they wrote, is not political but moral; the temptation to use money to buy unjust favors is an ancient one. And they reminded lawmakers that the prophet Amos thundered against those merchants in Israel who "sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes...and push the afflicted out of the way..." (Amos 2:6-7). In the letter, the religious leaders also asked for passage of the bipartisan Senate Bill 25.

**POLITICS MAKES STRANGE BEDFELLOWS** — What do casino developer Donald Trump, the Christian Coalition, Roman Catholic bishops and a UCC minister have in common?

They were successful in defeating a bill legalizing casino gambling in New York State. "Instead of doing First Timothy, we turned into a political action committee," recalls the Rev. John A. Eckman, minister of New England Congregational UCC, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Eckman admits that at first, he was reluctant to work with the Christian Coalition. And some of the other clergy were unhappy to rub shoulders with Trump, who was fearful casinos in New York would draw customers from his gaming tables in Atlantic City. But Trump's \$855,000 for lobbying was not to be sneezed at.

**NO TV?** — Growing up without the tube didn't seem to hurt Karl Happe. He graduated valedictorian from high school and summa cum laude from Princeton. But Carl did admit to being "out of the loop" socially with his peers in elementary school. Why no TV? Explains his father, the Rev. Allen Happe, pastor of First Congregational UCC in Cambridge (Mass.) UCC, "When kids aren't doing anything, they get bored, and when they get bored, they are forced to stretch their imaginations — to read, take up hobbies, play games, relate to others. TV soaks up that boredom to the detriment of other activities." Karl, now a banker, still doesn't own a television set.



**BEST IN THE PULPIT?** — Is the highlight of your Sunday worship the sermon?

If it is, and you want to assure your pastor is on the cutting edge of preaching, consider sending your minister to the Fourth Fosdick Convocation on Preaching and Worship, April 1-4 at New York City's historic Riverside Church UCC.

Sharing their skills will be two of the denomination's best preachers, the Rev. James Forbes of Riverside and the Rev. Jeremiah Wright of Trinity UCC in Chicago. Also on tap are more than 50 workshops from "Clergy in Stress" to "When Prayer Means Power."

Need more information? Call Richard Butler at (212) 870-6803.

**DON'T TINKER WITH PERSONAL ATTACK RULES** — The UCC Office of Communication and others have warned the Federal Communications Commission not to give in to demands from broadcasters to scrap personal attack rules.

These are longstanding regulations requiring broadcasters to give reply time to individuals whose honesty and integrity is attacked on the air and to political candidates whose opponents receive stations' editorial endorsements.

The Office of Communication says the rules have been upheld by the Supreme Court as part of broadcasters' requirements to serve as public trustees. The FCC sought public comments on a petition by the Radio and Television News Directors Association to dump the rules.

*Keeping You Posted* is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by the UCC Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Visit us on the World Wide Web at <http://www.ucc.org>.

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**EYEBALLING THE CHIEF** — When the Rev. Paul H. Sherry, UCC President, wanted to speak out on the government's welfare reform bill, he decided to go right to the top. So, with barely two days advance notice, he found himself in New York City's Riverside Church UCC, eyeball to eyeball with the President of the United States.

In a panel discussion with religious leaders at the famed church, Clinton said that as the government's role was reduced he hoped churches, states and the private sector would take up the slack.

That's fine, Mr. President, responded Sherry, but there are three necessary components.

The first is how serious a problem poverty is. "I wonder how many of us are aware that the child poverty rate in the U.S. is 50 percent higher than that of any other industrial country?" asked Sherry.

A second concern is the need to train people for new skills and find jobs along with affordable housing and decent health care.

"If our goal is to lift people out of poverty," and not to just reduce the welfare rolls, Sherry told the President, "a partnership is essential."

And lastly, Sherry called for advocacy policies to benefit families and children.

Are you listening, Mr. President?

**INTO FORBIDDEN LANDS** — Apparently, three UCC leaders can go where politicians fear to tread. In this case, it's the closed societies of North Korea and Iran where the United States has no diplomatic relations.

Accompanying a shipment of rice supplied by American churches to North Korea recently were Asia mission executive, the Rev. Ching-fen Hsiao of the UCC/Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Common Global Ministries Board and the Rev. Linda Petrucelli, relief executive with the United Church Board for World Ministries. They were invited by the [North] Korean Christians Federation.

"The government of North Korea recognizes that churches, with their worldwide connections, can do things governments can't," explains Petrucelli.

In an earlier trip Dale Bishop, Global Ministries Middle East executive, joined a World Council of Churches delegation to Iran. The delegation members were guests of Iranian Muslim clerics, many of whom are in high government posts. Sessions dealt with a variety of issues including such "political" ones as human rights, globalization and the environment.

Bishop is convinced that most Iranians want some kind of relationship with the West, and religious dialogue "may be one fragile thread that keeps the West and Iran in some kind of contact with one another."

But while he acknowledges some political motivations for the dialogue, he thinks common religious values more important.

"We will miss an opportunity, we will make a fundamental mistake," he worries, "if we do not meet the challenge of dialogue on its own terms, as an attempt to discover together what it is that God demands of us in this age."

The three UCC church leaders hope these dialogues, as fragile as they are given political realities, will flourish and grow.